

Fathers version 2

by Shoikana

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Summary: This version was written after requests to expand upon the first. In this version, Dick suffers a paralyzing injury, and Commissioner Gordon helps the Wayne family struggle through his recovery.

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> <meta name="ProgId"> Fathers (version 2)

I don't know why I'm doing this. I'm not even supposed to know who he is. But he needs to know what's happened, and there's been no answer from his civilian personaâ€" I can't even bring myself to say his nameâ€" in the past few hours, and I know he hasn't caught any news because he's been focused on the Taylor kidnapping case. It's cold so that I can see my breath as I wait on the rooftop for his response. I'm wearing my usual tan trenchcoat and I've got my hands stuffed in my pockets. Have I mentioned it's cold? Maybe it's more what I know I have to tell him when he gets here.

"What is it? You know how busy I am." I spin and jump involuntarily. I really wish he wouldn't do that, but the world would end before he would come to the roof from the direction I'm facing.

"I know. I'm sorry. But something's happened that I thought you should know, and I didn't think you'd see it." I know he sees that it's bad news.

"Something related to the kidnapping case?" As he asks it, I sense he's not allowing himself to believe that it is. If only it were.

"Um. Well it involves the police." Here it is. I've got to say it. "It happened in Blüdhaven." I watch for a reaction, and I can see it in his eyes. That's the only place to look if I want to see anything from him. I look to the ground, and I can feel the tears forming as I

try to say the words, "A young rookie cop has been critically injured in the line of duty. His name is Dick Grayson." I look up.

He's looking at the ground, weighing something. I doubt it's the fact that I just revealed that I know his identity. I've been in his shoes. Finally he speaks. "How bad?" I pause, looking at the ground again, trying to place into as few words as possible the information. I know he's too impatient for anything else.

"Bad," I start. "He's been shot in the back, and the bullet hit his spine." I pause again. "It happened a few hours ago. They've said that if he hadn't been in such excellent physical condition, that he would have died on the scene." I mention that in hopes that he might consider that it's his training and influence that has Dick in such excellent condition. Though truthfully, I doubt it will ever occur to him. "They've been trying to contact his.." I stumble, "next of kin." I think he catches that I used this meeting as a last resort. I'm having trouble keeping my emotions in check now, because I remember exactly where I was when I heard what he's about to hear, "They don't expect him to ever walk again."

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I'm here with Barbara. Coming here with my daughter makes the daily thirty-minute commute from Gotham a little more bearable. She could only stay a few minutes by Dick's bedside before she started to cry uncontrollably, and she said she was going to the chapel of the hospital. I offered to go with her, but she said she wanted me here with him; that she didn't want Dick to be alone. I think though she wanted to be alone, which is ok. Sometimes solitude is necessary, and one of the most important jobs for a parent to master is to know when his child needs to be alone.

I'm leaning back in a chair next to Dick's bedside. My eyes rest on the displays monitoring Dick, but I'm not seeing them. I can't bring myself to look at him for more than a few seconds. I'm used to seeing him young and vibrant and full of energy, but now we're in the ICU, and, connected to the myriad of life-supporting machines through tubes and wires, and wearing a mask that is helping him to breathe, he looks one step from death.

A few Blüdhaven cops have been here already, and some of the older ones knew me. I think they were impressed that I was here, although the younger ones who had to be told who I was seemed to think I was here because Dick is the son of Gotham's leading philanthropist. It doesn't matter to me what they think; I know why I'm here. It was clear by the expressions and support who Dick's partner is, and he vowed right here to get the guy that shot Dick. Of course the other cops supported him immediately.

I hear a sound, and my eyes avert from the monitors to the doorway. He's standing there looking at his son. I see an inner fire in his eyesâ€"like he's going to make his son well through simple willâ€"that I've always known to be there, although now it seems to stand out more. Maybe it's because I've finally allowed myself to acknowledge who he is at night. Or maybe he acknowledges that I know so that he doesn't feel it necessary to mask his true personality like I've seen him do so well. Or maybe he's just exhausted.

He doesn't smile as he nods his head in greeting and says,

"Jim."

"Hello, Bruce," I say sympathetically, making my observation of him obvious. I know he doesn't like it. I turn my attention back to Dick and provide a progress report, "The doctors say he's doing better today, and if things go well, they hope he'll be conscious by the end of the week." God forbid things don't go well.

He cuts off my next word, "But no more progress on the paralysis?"

I pause for a minute, wishing better news wouldn't be a lie. Finally, I admit quietly, "No." He pauses for a moment, and then steps up to his son's bedside, resting his hands on the side rail of the bed. I watch as he watches Dick silently, and I wonder what's going through his mind. I have a good guess. If he's anything like me, he's running through his head what he could have done since birth—or in Dick's case, age 9—to prevent these turn of events. I know now that nothing could have prevented this, but I also know he needs to find that out for himself. I just hope to God that he does.

It's been about two hours since Barbara left this room in tears, and I think it's time for me to see how my little girl is doing. Now that Bruce is here, I feel more comfortable leaving Dick. Besides, during a time like this, Bruce needs to be alone with his son.

I excuse myself and head down to the chapel. I find my Barbara in the back just staring at the altar in front of her. I step quietly up behind her and rest my hand on her shoulder. She looks up and me, and, although her eyes are still red and puffy from tears, her eyes are dry. I move around her and sit in the pew next to her. I sit a moment, leaning forward with my elbows on my knees and my hands clasped in front of me. I look at the simple cross in front while I figure out the words to say. Finally I simply ask, "How are you doing, sweetheart?"

After a moment of silence, I turn my gaze to my daughter, and I can see she's trying hard not to cry again. Finally she gets her words out, although her voice is a little shaky, "I don't want him to have to live like this." I know she's referring to her chair. "It would kill him." I notice that although his life is still in danger, she doesn't even bring that up. I find myself wondering if it's because she thinks living in a wheelchair would be worse than dying, or if she simply can't bring herself to even consider that possibility. Needless to say, I hope it's the latter.

I nod and say, "He's strong, Barbara. If that's what life gives him, he'll make it. He has too much of Bruce in him."

"No," she protests, "You don't know how important activity is to him. He wouldn't know what to do."

I look at Barbara in her beautiful green eyes, and I say seriously, "I do know." I know my daughter knows their secret, because I know she held that same secret. I hesitate, trying to find the words, and then I relay the events of last night, "I was the one to tell Bruce. At night. On the rooftop of the precinct." I look to see if she understands my meaning, and I see that she does. She looks at me in disbelief, and then just nods.

We sit in silence for a moment, and I see out of the corner of my eye

that her tears are starting to flow again. She says quietly, "Daddy, I think I love him."

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Dick's been here a week, and I've been here most of the time. I'm here mostly for Bruce, because I know he's still obsessed with finding the Taylor boy, but of course he wants to be here too. I think knowing I'm here helps him to cope. It's very quiet in the tiny room Dick and I occupy, and I'm reading the daily reports my men have been bringing to me. They don't understand why I'm so insistent on staying by Dick's bedside. To them, like the younger Blüdhaven cops, Dick is a rich man's son who decided to try his hand at police work and almost paid with his life.

I'm here for my own peace. Both Dick and Bruce have done so much for Gotham--and Dick for Blüdhaven--both during the day and at night. They both deserve all the support I can give them. But of course I can't tell my men how much the father and son team have done and how much respect they deserve from us.

I try to concentrate on the words before me when I hear something rustle. I look up and don't notice right away, but then I look at Dick, and realize he's starting to wake up. I immediately put aside the reports and go by his bedside. I push the nurse's call button as I watch Dick start to struggle for consciousness. I put my hand on his arm and say, "Dick? Can you hear me, son?"

I watch as his eyes flutter open, and he tries to puzzle out his environment. After a few seconds, he looks at me and weakly asks, "Bruce?"

"No, son," I say gently, "It's Commissioner Gordon." I figure I'll let him think for now that I'm here in a professional capacity. "Bruce will be back shortly." Truth was I wasn't sure when he'd be back, but as soon as Dick got settled again, I'll call him.

"Commissioner?" The word is almost too long for him to say, and he trails off near the end of it. "What happened?"

I start an explanation as the nurse comes into the room. Before I start, she says, "Good! You're awake! I'll go get the doctor!" She leaves the room, and I notice that even in his weakened state, Dick looks relieved. I imagine he doesn't want to deal with anyone he doesn't know, especially if that someone is artificially cheerful. He always did hate that. He turns his head back to me expectantly.

"You were shot in the line of duty while trying to stop a robbery. Your precinct has had someone here every day so far to check up on you. They caught the guy that shot you a few days ago."

I'm about to say more when he interrupts with another question, "Shot where? It hurts all over." He pauses a moment, as if he's mentally checking himself, "Except my legs." He's puzzled, I can see it.

"Shot in the back," I start, and I hesitate. "The bullet grazed your spine.." I can see panic start to set in, and I know I don't have to tell what's happened to his legs. I do say quickly, "The doctors

point out that the bullet didn't actually penetrate your spine, so it may be simply bruised and need time to heal. There's no saying you're paralyzed for life, son." He seems to accept the words, or maybe it's simply that he has no energy for further panic. He closes his eyes as though he's trying to black out the thought of what's happened to him.

I tell him, "I'm going to call your home, your precinct, and Barbara, ok, son?" Eyes closed, he nods consent, and I proceed with delivering my good news. Of course I call Bruce first and I get his butler Alfred Pennyworth on the phone. I deliver the news, and he relays relief in his proper British accent and a promise to tell Bruce. Next I call the captain of Dick's precinct, and I hear cheers as he relays the message to the room. Lastly, I call my little girl, and she insists on coming immediately, so I offer to go get her. Dick will be sleeping now anyway.

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It's been a few weeks since Dick regained consciousness, and two weeks since he was moved out of the ICU. His recovery process has been amazing. I think Barbara has been the best medicine for him to date, and she insists on coming every day. Bruce comes when he can, but not as often as one would think a father would come for his son, and I think Barbara doesn't understand how Bruce can choose the Taylor case over his son. But I think I can. It's just something about making sure the young innocent citizens of Gotham stay safe. Especially if you've suffered such a tragic loss yourself as a young boy, and Bruce knows that Dick is getting support from us. But I also think he doesn't realize how important his presence is to Dick.

To Dick's credit, he seems to be taking his condition relatively well. It's hard to tell though what he's feeling inside; he's more like Bruce than I think he knows. I suspect that he's putting on a good show for Barbara. He's even kidded about having a chance with her now. Apparently she's always used her disability as an excuse not to have a relationship with him.

I can tell he's being careful not to hurt Barbara's feelings--God, one would think it would be the other way around--when he talks about not giving up. I've heard him swear to all that will listen, myself included, that he will walk again. But he's afraid that he'll hurt Barbara--that he'll make her feel as though she didn't try hard enough. If that happens, I'll be there to assure my little girl that that's not true. I was there, and I know she and all who love her tried their damndest.

"Commissioner?" I hear my title, and realize it's Dick calling me. By his tone, I can tell he had been trying to get my attention. Since the last time Bruce was here, he has stopped questioning my presence. It was amazing to watch the conversation under the spoken conversation. When Bruce started to present Dick with a case to work on--not the Taylor case, by the way--Dick gave him a kind of warning look with a furrowed brow and glanced at me. Bruce acknowledged his look with a nod and a meaningful glance to me and continued. I could see Dick got the message loud and clear, and didn't hear a word Bruce said afterwards for the shock he was feeling. Maybe now he understands the loyalty I feel toward him and his guardian.

I break the daze I didn't realize I was in and look at him, "I'm

sorry, Dick. Did you say something?" With the help of a back support and lots of painkillers, he's sitting up in bed looking over some casework that a couple of Blüdhaven cops dropped off a few hours ago. If it were anyone else, I'd think the painkillers would keep him from thinking straight, but I've seen Dick in action—both as himself and as...at night. When the Blüdhaven cops were here, I noticed that Dick seemed to be uncomfortable, but I guess I would be too. People who know you only as an able, hard-working person because you've fought hard for that image now seeing you disabled in a hospital bed. I think that would be hard for anyone.

They claimed that they brought the cases because they were stuck, and they hoped that Dick could see something everyone else missed. Normally, I'd think that was an excuse to keep Dick's mind off his body, but in this case, I think they're telling the truth. On the force only a few months, and already Dick has a reputation clear into Gotham for excellent detective skills. But who's surprised. He was trained by the best.

"Yeah. Can you put this in the VCR, please?"

He has a video tape? Oh, God, he's looking at the Taylor case. I heard that case got expanded to Blüdhaven last week because the kidnappers were thought to be on the move, and he must have asked the cops to bring that case. Can't be a coincidence. I answer, "Sure," I get up to retrieve the tape from him. As I put it in, and with an attempted casualness, I ask, "This the Taylor case?" He nods. I ask, "What made you chose this case?" Although I already know the answer.

He shrugged. "Seemed like a tough one," he says. Yeah, you could say that. If Batman hasn't cracked it in 3 weeks, it definitely qualifies as tough. I can't help thinking that he wants to show Bruce that he's still capable. Still the son that Bruce knows. Which is fine. Especially if he cracks the case. I know that we've both noticed that Bruce hasn't been here as often as one might expect him to be, but I know that a visit from Tim Drake informed Dick of this case and how obsessed Bruce has been with it. Perhaps Dick has it in his mind that if he cracks the case, Bruce's full attention will be turned to him. I hope he's right, because frankly, Dick needs it.

I stick the tape in and push play. I've seen the tape before, so it's no surprise. It's a taping of the Taylor boy to show us that he's uninjured. I watch Dick as he mentally scours the tape for even the tiniest clue. It comes to the part that the guys at the station always seemed to get a kick out of. When the kid, who's been moving around the whole time trying to get away, wiggles out of view of the camera, and it takes an accomplice off-camera to get the camera man to move to follow the kid. To my surprise, Dick rewinds that part and watches it again. I watch as his face scrunches in thought, and I can almost see his mind working. He sees a clue, I can tell, but he's not sure what it is.

Suddenly I see a thought occur to him, and he asks me, "Does something like that happen again? Where the videographer zones out?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, it does. About three more times, and the tape is 40 minutes long. The best we could come up with is that the guy has a really short attention span." As I finish my sentence, Dick

is shaking his head and looking more and more excited.

"No!" He says, "I think the guy is epileptic!" I don't think I've ever seen him so excited, but then, I don't think I've ever seen him work out a problem. At least not without a mask.

I furrow my brow as I ask, "Epileptic? Isn't that when the person starts thrashing around on the ground?"

Dick explains excitedly, "That's a grand mal seizure. Epileptics can have petite mal seizures too, when they just blank out. Just like that guy! Why don't you have the detectives check local pharmacies for a script of Dilantin or some other drug for seizures. Check for a new patient, and check surrounding areas too. If they're moving, maybe they left a trail of scripts. Even with the added stress, which adds to the probability of having a seizure, with seizures that close in proximity they've got to be going through scripts like candy," Man, this kid's good. Bruce must be proud. I know I am, and he's not even my son. He pauses a moment, and his brow furrows. He questions, "Has Bruce seen it?" I nod. "Strange that he didn't catch that. It seems kind of obvious to me."

"Well, in his defense, I think Bruce has had a lot on his mind. The tape came in the day after you were shot."

He shrugs, "So? A case is a case, and Bruce can block out any distractions."

"Dick, Bruce may be good, but when your only child is critically injured, no one can think straightâ€"not even Bruce. I was the one to tell Bruce that you had been hurt, and the night you were shot you almost died. Trust me, he was distracted." He solemnly thinks a moment, then nods.

Suddenly the somber mood was interrupted, "Hey! Quit looking so serious! You're both scaring me," Barbara says cheerfully as she wheels herself into the room.

I can't help but smile broadly at my little girl as she looks at me. "That's better. How about you?" She asks Dick. I think she's right; that she really does love him. I see him look into her smiling eyes and get caught in her mood. He returns her smile, to which she responds, "Much better!" as she blows him a kiss. She asks, "How's PT going?"

Dick shrugs, and his smile shrinks a notch, "Nothing yet," he answers. I see him look at my baby for hope. And she delivers.

"Don't you give up, Grayson," she says in mock toughness. "I know lots of people who have succeeded, including Bruce. Like father, like son, right?" My God, Bruce? That's right, the supposed car accident years ago. Around the same time when Gotham got a new Bat... Dick's smile returns to its full size and he nods. "Speaking of Bruce, where is he?"

"Right here." Ever notice how Bruce has the ability to appear whenever he's asked for? "How're you doing, Dick?" His concern is obvious, but I know he's lightened by his son's smile.

"I'm doing ok, Bruce. I'm glad you're here. Take a look at this," He rewinds and plays the tape, and I notice Bruce seems a little surprised, although if I hadn't been watching him, I would have missed the reaction completely. Dick lets the tape play and shares with his father his theory.

Bruce nods thoughtfully and says, "Good work, Dick." I watch as Dick seems to positively glow at the complement. Bruce thinks a moment more on what Dick has presented and nods thoughtfully. This case is cracked, I think. After a moment he turns to his son and asks what Barbara asked a moment ago, "How is physical therapy?"

Dick hesitates a moment. He doesn't want to have to tell Bruce that he's been having no success. I almost think Dick has it in his mind that Bruce would be up and doing a jig by now. He simply shrugs and breaks eye contact with Bruce, looking at the papers in front of him and bringing his right hand up to fidgetfully play with the papers. I'm watching Bruce through this exchange, and I see some disappointment that his son won't answer him, but I also see determination. The kind of determination that demands success.

"I take it no success yet." I notice that 'yet.' Not everyone would have put it there. "Mind if we try together?" I see Dick taken by surprise at the question, not so much because Bruce wants to try, but because he asked Dick, rather than told him.

"I'd rather not.." Dick starts, but he gets stopped by Bruce's expression. The kind of expression that asks if he's given up already. Dick sighs and nods resignedly. Barbara wheels herself next to me so that she can get a better view of what Bruce is going to do. I put my hand on Barbara's shoulder and squeeze, meaning to give the message that I'm there for her, and she turns and gives me a smile. I'll always be there for her. We watch together as Bruce uncovers Dick's feet and legs to the knee and begins to massage. I watch what he does carefully, and I don't understand it, but it's very methodical, as though it's a well-practiced, ages-old traditional form of medicine. Dick is watching too with an impassive look. I know he can't feel the massage, and he's probably not letting his hopes get too high.

After about ten minutes, Bruce stops and tells Dick, "Ok, try to move. Use Master Jinsu's meditation technique." I have no idea what that means, but Dick doesn't even hesitate. He gives Bruce an expression mixed with hope, frustration, and pain. Not physical pain, but the kind of emotional pain one gets after being disappointed again and again. Dick sighs again, but not a resigned sigh this time, more of a relaxing sigh. As he lets the breath release, he closes his eyes, lets his hand drop from the tray in front of him, and rests his head on his pillow. I think after a moment that I see a blue glow surrounding him, but I must be seeing things.

Watching Dick fall into his meditative state, I forgot that I should be looking at his exposed legs, but I jump a moment later when Barbara exclaims excitedly, "There! Did you see it!?" I shift quickly to match her gaze, but whatever she saw is gone. But Bruce is wearing an amazing smile; I didn't ever know he could smile like that; and Dick has opened his eyes, looking at Bruce. I think Dick doesn't know that he succeeded except for his father's and my daughter's reactions.



"You did it, son," Bruce congratulates, continuing to wear his winning smile. Dick mirrors his smile exactly, so that you'd think there was no way the two of them couldn't be biologically father and son. "This proves that you'll be walking again soon." As I share in the moment, I think the most important component of this event was not that Dick successfully moved his legs, but that he did it with Bruce's help.

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"Leave me the hell alone!" That's Dick yelling at his physical therapist. We're in the hospital's PT room, and having just arrived to pick up my baby, I'm watching Dick be frustrated, and Barbara try to be supportive while at the same time trying to dodge Dick's outbursts. She's sitting on the far end of the mat, leaning against a back support, and her chair is abandoned for the moment. Dick's dressed in gray sweats, and his sweatshirt proudly declares itself the property of the Blådhaven police department. The outfit was a gift from his precinct. He's sitting on the floor mat with his legs out in front of him and with his hands behind him to support his weight. His therapist is on her knees beside him currently trying to keep her patience.

"Come on, Dick," she coaxes, "Try again. I don't have to tell you you're not going to get anywhere if you don't keep trying. I know you're frustrated." Dick glares at her. "But you can't let your leg muscles deteriorate. I can tell you care about the shape you're in."

I know that comment reminds Dick of his nighttime pursuits, and he sighs and prepares to try again. He glances at Barbara, and she nods to him supportively. He closes his eyes in concentration, and a full minute goes by before he opens his eyes again, and releases his breath in a rush. He shakes his head and starts, "I can't. I just can't.."

Barbara speaks up, "Come on, hon, I know you can. Just remember upstairs."

Dick argues dejectedly, "That was just luck."

"I don't believe that for a second," Barbara argues back. Her Irish spunk is starting to show itself as she counters, "I've known you too long, Grayson. I know you can do this."

"I'm telling you, I can't!" His depression turns to anger again, and Barbara's pursed lips and narrowing eyes make it clear that she's trying not to take his shouting personally. He gets ready to yell something else when he catches himself and drops his head, shaking it.

"Ok, Dick," the therapist starts to run interference, and I'm willing to bet she's used to this kind of scene. "Why don't we call it a day. I'll come back tomorrow and we can try again."

"Don't bother," he mumbles, and I notice that Barbara looks like she's trying to hold back tears.

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It's been two months now, and after his initial frustrations, Dick had some major successes so that now he's even able to stand for a minute without support. He has been moved to a rehabilitation hospital in Gotham. The location was a compromise; Alfred and Bruce wanted Dick to come home and go through his rehabilitation under Alfred's watchful eye, and Dick wanted to keep his independence. Both parties agreed that they could live with admitting Dick in the Gotham hospital. I think that it's certainly more convenient as I'm on my way to pick up Barbara after an afternoon spent keeping Dick company. His back wound is healed, and he is having trouble keeping himself from climbing the walls. Unfortunately, not literally. Yet. The Taylor case has long been solved, so Bruce has been spending more time with him, and I feel that I can come more infrequently. Both Bruce and Barbara have said that he's much more positive than he was two months ago, so that all he wants to do is practice what the therapist gives him. The reports from the therapist are optimistic. She's amazed at Dick's progress, but considering the peak shape he was in before the accident and his incredible determination, it's not terribly surprising.

I start to step off the elevator, when I'm almost run over by a wheelchair; my only warning is an exuberant "YAHOO!" After only a split second of mental rewind, I realize that it's my daughter that almost ran me over. I quickly step back and look in the direction the chair came from. Which is good, because Dick is following close behind at breakneck speed and with a huge grin, not worrying about who he might run over in the process. I let him pass me, and as he says, "Hey, Commish!" in greeting, I almost hear the Doppler Effect. I watch the pair race away from me, and Barbara does a wheelie to turn a corner and races out of view. Dick struggles through the turn, but once through, he continues with as much vigor as his leader.

I go to Dick's room to wait for the racers' return. As I enter the room, I see a handsome red-headed young man sitting laid-back in a chair, and I greet him with a smile and a nod. "How are you doing, Roy?" I ask.

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He returns my smile and answers, "Not bad." He seems more relaxed than other times we've been together which is often in these past few months. Dick formally introduced us soon after he was able, so Roy knows that I'm Gotham's police commissioner and Barbara's father. That information seems to make him nervous, but Dick once told me that most adults have that effect on his friend. Although all of Dick's friends have visited him regularly, I notice that Roy seems special in his dedication to supporting Dick. I once asked Barbara about it, and she told me that when they were teenagers, Dick really helped Roy out a tight spot. By her tone and the fact that Roy seems to be the kind of person that usually doesn't take things seriously at all, I'm guessing that 'spot' was the difference between life and death, and not like the normal 'spots' that costumed heroes find themselves in.

"They should be back soon," I offer, "I just saw them racing down the hallway." That produces a grin from Dick's friend, and as if on cue, Barbara and Dick come wheeling in, laughing hysterically. In response to Dick's laughter, Roy's smile gets broader. He stands up to greet Dick with a high five, which Dick returns enthusiastically. "Hey, Roy," he greets.

At the same time, I'm greeted with Barbara's amazing smile as she says, "Hi, Dad! Sorry about that at the elevator."

I find her laughter infectious and I smile back, "That's ok, hon. It's good to keep an old man on his toes. How are you doing, Dick?"

After a moment catching his breath, Dick answers, "Not bad, sir." After two months of almost daily contact, he still calls me sir. I'm not sure if that's because I'm the commissioner of police, because he was trained since youth to respect his elders, or because one day he hopes to have my favor in dating Barbara. If the case is the latter, he doesn't need to worry at all. "Babs has been training me for the wheelchair Olympics." As he says it, he turns his glowing smile to Barbara which she returns.

"Don't you get used to it, Mister," Barbara mock threatens, "You're going to be walking soon." As she says it, I get the feeling that Barbara doesn't feel sorry for herself. "He's doing really well, Dad. Just today he took his first step!" She beams at Dick. It's occurred to me more than once that through this whole process Barbara hasn't once seemed to reflect on Dick's success and wonder why it couldn't be her. She seems nothing but happy for Dick, and even seems to be feeding off his success. A sign of love if I've ever seen it. I wouldn't be surprised at all if I'm in the presence of my future son-in-law.

Roy responds first with, "Great! You'll be back to chasing skirts in no time!"

I notice Dick blush at Barbara's praise even as he gives Roy a warning glare. Barbara chooses to pointingly ignore Roy's comment. Roy looks at his friend, and then at Barbara, and says half to himself, "Oops."

After ending his visual assault on Roy, Dick adds modestly, "It was with support though. I still have a long way to go."

"But you're getting there. Gotham wasn't built in a day." Barbara points out. "You'll be..flying..in no time." We all understand what she means.

Dick's demeanor changes as he says almost apologetically, "Babs, I.."

Before he can finish, Barbara is shaking her head and cuts him off, "Don't you dare, Grayson. This is about you, not me. One out of two ain't bad, and if you get to be the one, that's ok. Given the choice, I would give it to you anyway."

Dick looks down at his hands, and I can tell Roy and I are forgotten. "Problem is, I want to give it to you." Barbara reaches over and puts her hand on Dick's knee as she starts to tear up. I notice with interest that Dick moves his leg nervously as he glances at me, and can obviously feel Barbara's touch.

The moment is broken by Roy, "Hey, hey! No soap opera stuff! I get enough of that with Donna!"

"So Donna's still talking to you?" Dick lightens his mood as he

teases Roy. Last time Roy was here, he said that he and Donna were fighting.

"Yeah, she can't resist me." Roy delivers his devil-may-care smile, and Dick and Barbara both shake their heads resignedly, although only Dick is still wearing a smile.

"So, Ba..Dicky-Boy," Roy glances sideways at me. I know what he was about to call Dick, but he doesn't know that I know Dick's secret. "What are you doing two weeks from this Saturday?"

"Work." Dick says matter-of-factly. He means working on his physical therapy.

"Aw, come on, Dick. You can't work all the time." Then he amends, "Well..yes \*you\* can." He continues, "There's a benefit for D.A.R.E. that I'm helping to organize." I notice Barbara look up at Roy with a surprised expression. I have to go to that benefit, and I'm willing to bet Bruce will be there too. I didn't know Roy helped to organize it; knowing that makes me wonder if that aforementioned 'spot' was drug-related. "Think you can break out of here for it? I can use all the support I can get. You can bring a guest." He winks at Barbara and she rolls her eyes, although her attitude towards him has seemed to lighten.

Dick smiles, and says, "Well if you put it like that, I'd love to go." His smile makes its way to Barbara. "By that time, I think they'll kick me out of here anyway." Dick sighs. "I'm going to have to let Alfred coddle me." His tone indicates that it's something he knew was inevitable.

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It is the night of Roy's fundraiser, and Barbara and I have just arrived at Wayne Manor. I haven't been here since dropping Barbara off more than 10 years ago to baby-sit a much younger Dick Grayson. But Barbara wanted to meet beforehand, arriving at the fundraiser together. Although Sarah is going to the fundraiser, she said she'd meet us there because she had some last minute things to do at the station. My wife the workaholic.

Alfred greets us and, after assuring us that Bruce and Dick would be with us momentarily, hurries away. On afterthought, I think Alfred looked fairly ruffledâ€"well at least as ruffled as I think he ever gets. Barbara notices it too, because she says to me, "I hope everything's ok."

A moment later, Alfred returns and informs us that our presence is requested in another part of the house. We follow him through a series of hallways and before reaching our destination, I can hear shouting. It seems odd to me that Bruce or Dick would ask us to come to them if they're arguing, unless one of them thinks we can help to resolve the issue.

"I'm not going!" Dick shouts as Barbara and I enter the room. Alfred gives us an apologetic glance, as though he's sorry we have to witness the tantrum of his younger charge. Dick is sitting mostly-dressed in his wheelchair; his tuxedo shirt is unbuttoned, and of course he has yet to put the tie on. His hair could also use a good brushing, but I'm sure Alfred fully intends to brush it himself

if he has to. Bruce is the target of Dick's yelling, and is standing straight in front of his son, looking him forcefully in the eye. I recognize the chair as the one Bruce used after his accident.

"You *are* going because you gave Roy your promise. I won't have you sitting at home feeling sorry for yourself. Besides, Barbara can sympathize with you." Ahh, now I see why we were asked to come here.

Dick looks at my daughter with what starts out as a glare left over from confronting Bruce, but by the time his eyes rest on her, his expression has softened, if only a little. "Barbara's never had to put up with your idiot social peers before her chair, let alone after. It's bad enough they all think you took me in because you felt sorry for me, but now they've got this damn chair to fuel their petty little fire!"

Barbara speaks up, helping Bruce's defense, "Since when do you care what those people think? We all know they're a shallow, selfish group. It will be ok, Dick. Consider that you'll be walking again someday soon." Dick is actually able to walk with assistance now, but not far, and he gets tired quickly, so it was decided that he would use the chair for this event. Barbara's words make Dick look in his lap shamefully, and Barbara pauses for effect, "Or consider it an exercise—a study in me. See what I have to put up with every day of my life." She's starting to get a little short with him, which I think is certainly understandable, although that last suggestion seemed to make a dent in Dick's stubborn barrier. He always did like to study the experiences of others, and I think my baby is an especially interesting 'case' for him.

He looks up at Barbara, and I can see the intrigue in his eyes. His stubborn countenance melts away as he gives Barbara an apologetic smile, and says, "You're right. I'm sorry." He starts to button his shirt, "I'll be ready in a minute." As expected, Alfred, who had been quietly standing the doorway watching the scene disdainfully, steps forward and starts to fuss over Dick. Initially Dick pulls away like any child would do to his parent's fussing, and then resigned, lets Alfred get him ready. Bruce gives a satisfied nod to his son, and then leads us out of the room, knowing Alfred will have Dick ready in a couple minutes.

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We got out of the house and to the fundraiser without many other problems. These fundraisers are probably the one thing I hate most about this job. But at least I get to be with my little girl and my wife—Sarah was waiting for us when we arrived. Roy pulled some strings and has us all sitting at the same table--Dick, Bruce, Barbara, me, Sarah, and Bruce's date Bambi. Roy is here helping to make sure all goes smoothly, not surprisingly as a member of security, and once in a while he'll catch our attention and wink. The women of our table have already commented on how well he cleans up if you dress him up in a tux and comb his hair.

Earlier I saw Bruce greet Dr. Taylor, and I know he was asking the doctor about his son. Even at these events, Bruce is working. By their body language, I could tell that all is well with the boy, although I didn't see Mrs. Taylor. My guess is that she chose to stay home with the boy, because I'm sure the boy is still traumatized by

his experience.

Dinner occurred without much of a problem, and now there's dancing. I don't think Dick would want to dance if he couldâ€"in fact the chair saves him from having to dance with the flaky women that attach themselves to himâ€"but he still looks like he's feeling sorry for himself. He has his chin resting in his hand, and from across the table he's absentmindedly watching Bruce put on his bachelor socialite play.

Bruce gives an almost ridiculous giggle, "Oh, Bambi, that is so funny!" His date is a young princess of another millionaire citizen of Gotham, and is seated between Bruce and Barbara. It's clear that Bambi's looking to get her claws into him, but Bruce is just playing along, as though for the moment Bambi has his complete, fluffy attention and he's clueless to her wiles. It's absolutely amazing how Bruce can cover his personality with all that frivolity. Knowing his true personality makes me almost embarrassed for him, but on further reflection, I think he sometimes enjoys playing the part.

Dick looks like he's trying hard not to roll his eyes, and Barbara's watching him carefully. Sarah's watching the dancing, and I'm sure I'll be coerced later. I've seen Dick play the millionaire's son almost as well as Bruce plays the millionaire, but obviously tonight he's in no mood to act. Suddenly I see him start to blush, and I see Barbara's small wicked smile. I notice that her hands are not visible, and I try not to imagine what's going on under the table.

I'm aware of a voice at an adjoining table, and before I know it, I'm eavesdropping. The voice is a woman's and sounds as shallow as Bambi's, "That poor man! It's not enough that he save that boy from a migrant's life, now he has to support a cripple!" I hear someone else agree in a low scandalous voice, "Yes, and he couldn't just accept his good fortune; he had to go work for the police in such a dangerous city!" I try not to make my glance obvious as I look carefully at Dick, and it's clear he heard it too. His expression is one of anger mixed with hurt. I've noticed that over the years his expression to those kinds of comments has become more and more angry and less and less hurtful. I look at Bruce look at his ward as his own expression is slowly wearing away the frivolous mask. Both Sarah and Barbara become aware of what's transpiring, but Bambi is clueless--looking at something in the distance.

The slanderous remarks continue as suddenly Bruce's eyes dangerously narrow and he stands and spins, for the people speaking are behind him. His quick movement attracts his audience's attention, and he says heatedly, "He may not have my name, but Dick is as much my son as John is yours! I'm proud of his accomplishments, and of his career choice! Yes, he has to use a chair now, but he's going to be ok, not that you care. I do not feel taken advantage of; I feel lucky that my son wasn't killed!!"

I look at Dick and Barbara, and see their mouths hanging open which makes me realize that I'm wearing the same expression. I don't think Bruce has ever broken his carefree mask in public, but I guess every man, even Bruce, has his breaking point. I think I see evidence of tears in Dick's eyes, and I don't think Bruce has ever been so forceful to someone else about his love for Dick, let alone to Dick himself. Both Sarah and Bambi look more surprised than shocked, which

makes sense because neither one knows Bruce's true self.

Before Bruce could explain his outburst, our attention is drawn by a commotion at the other side of the room. I look over to see a masked gunman and for a second I just hang my head in resignation. Why do these things always happen when I'm here? Do I attract crazies? Thinking a moment, I'm willing to bet the same thought is going through both Dick's and Bruce's minds.

None of us make a move. First rule: learn the situation before you act. We all know that rule very well. I notice that Bruce is still standing, and has turned a quarter turn to the right, focused on the gunman. The gunman addresses us, "Everyone keep quiet and no one will get hurt! Now, nice and slow, put your valuables on the table. And if anyone knows Nightwing, call him up. We're not leaving until he gets here."

I try to be discrete in looking at Dick, and I see his puzzled expression as he looks at Bruce. Bruce is mirroring his expression to a degree, and he steals a glance to his son. I think they're wondering why this yahoo is looking for Nightwing in Gotham when everyone knows that he operates in Blüdhaven. I can see Dick's mind working; obviously he can't appear as Nightwing now, and he's trying to figure out how to resolve the situation.

Suddenly our attention is drawn to the gunman again as we hear him cry out. I see a steak knife sticking out of the hand that was a moment ago holding the gun, and he's holding his hand painfully. After a quick glance around the room, I see Roy standing defensively not far from the antagonist and holding another knife. "Bring it on, man," I hear him say. "You'll have to settle for this Titan, because my buddy is out of town." Definite argument for a public id. The guy obviously didn't do his homework or else he would have known that a Titan was working here. Or else he did know and he figured Nightwing would be here to support him.

I look around our table again; I'm at the side of the table facing the antagonist, so that I have to turn around to see my companions; and I see Dick looking restless, and Bruce giving him a warning look telling Dick to sit still. Dick knows that's what he should do, but like any of us in law enforcement, especially when we're named as the cause, he wants to go into action.

The antagonist, tamed by Roy's marksmanship, quickly gives up and other security people move in. Convinced that the scene is over, Roy steals a questioning glance at Dick from across the room. Dick acknowledges his look with a quick nod and turns to the table. By the glance he gives Barbara, I suspect she's holding his hand under the table. Bruce speaks next, "Well! That was a bit of excitement! Good thing we had one of those Titans here! Who would have thought one of those famous kids would be here!" His tone of voice almost makes Dick crack a smile, which I suspect was part of Bruce's objective.

After only a moment, Roy comes up to our table with a big grin. Bruce gives him a warning look, to which Roy responds with a look that seems to say, "I \*know\*" He starts out playing the host, standing behind Dick and putting his left hand on Dick's right shoulder, "So how are you all doing this evening? I hope that little incident didn't frighten you." His tone is almost patronizing, as though he knows the kind of role Bruce and Dick are forced to play when in

these circles.

"Oh! How wonderful you were!" Bambi bubbles over, and I think we all have to keep from busting out laughing.

Roy moves around the table, smiling charmingly at Bambi. When he reaches her, he takes her hand, says, "Anything for you, fair maiden," and kisses her hand. Bambi responds with a giggle, covering her mouth with her other hand, and a blush.

Dick grins, and he tells his father, "Bruce you'd better watch it. When Roy moves in, he moves in for the kill." Knowing Dick's sense of humor, I'm certain that was an intended pun.

Not moving, and still holding Bambi's hand, Roy looks up and returns his friend's grin and then grins to Bruce. I think Roy's enjoying having Bruce 'trapped' so that he has to play along. "Oh, no, Mr. Harper, your ways will not take my Bambi away from me!" His words are playful, but if you look carefully in his eyes, you'll see a different kind of mischief. Like Roy will pay later. I know Roy notices, because he visibly swallows and then returns to his grinning countenance. I see that both Dick and Barbara are enjoying the exchange.

"Well I'd better go before I get into trouble," Roy says, still grinning. I think he's purposefully vague on whether he'd get in trouble here or from not being at his post. He excuses himself with, "Ladies," a cavalier bow to Sarah and then to Barbara, and a wink and a grin to Dick. He leaves us all either smiling or grinning, and some of us are shaking our heads.

I know I should wait, but curiosity is killing me, so I say supposedly half to myself and rhetorically, "I wonder why he was looking for Nightwing. Everyone knows Nightwing is in Blüdhaven."

Dick picks up on it, and shrugs, "Probably because last time Nightwing was seen, he was seen in Gotham." He adds almost as an afterthought, "The police try to keep tabs on him. We don't want to stop him; he does too much good; but we want to know what he's up to."

I nod thoughtfully. Dick is pretty good at talking about himself like he's someone else. I continue to wonder out loud, "Wonder why he was looking for him."

Dick shrugs and says, "I wouldn't worry about it. Nuts are always out looking for guys like that. I'm sure they can take care of themselves." He shrugs again, "Roy never seems to take threats like that seriously."

Barbara speaks up, "Roy never takes anything seriously." Both Dick and I let out a little laugh. Barbara's observance is certainly true. Although Dick sounds like he's talking about someone else, he really doesn't sound concerned at all, so I guess I shouldn't be. I'm pulled away from further conversation when Sarah whispers in my ear a request to dance. The dance floor is relatively empty now; most people were apparently frightened out of a dancing mood. But not my wife; she wouldn't let a little thing like a gunman who's been disarmed stop her from having a good time; that's just one thing I



love about her.

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It's about two months after Roy's fundraiser, and Dick is able to walk without support, although not as quickly as normal. It's a warm Saturday afternoon and I'm standing outside Barbara's apartment waiting for her to answer the door. We made plans to go to the park together and watch the kids play baseball. I would have thought it would be the opposite, but ever since my little girl was confined to a wheelchair, she has been more interested in watching the activities she can't do anymore.

The door opens, and my baby is looking at me smiling and asking me to come in. I enter, and I can tell she's excited about something. Before I can ask her what has her in such a good mood, she says, "Hi, Daddy! Come look at this!" To my surprise she leads me to her workstation she uses as Oracle. Soon after that day in the hospital chapel when I revealed to her that I know who Batman is, she revealed to me that she is Oracle, and honestly, I had a good idea that she was behind the information guru.

Suddenly she stops. "Wait..you know who Bruce and Dick are..do you know who Robin is?"

She has a look like she's afraid her surprise is going to be spoiled, so I'm happy I can answer her, although I have no idea why she's asking. I look at her, puzzled, and answer, "Tim Drake."

Her bubbly mood resumes as she continues on her path and exclaims, "Good! Look at this!" We reach her workstation, and she points to a monitor. I see Dick and Tim; I've met Tim only recently while he was visiting Dick in the hospital, so I recognize him without his mask; and they look like they're underground in a cave of some kind. Must be the infamous Batcave.

I realize that we're looking at a surveillance camera's output and I ask, "Should you be spying on them like this?"

Barbara waves her hand dismissively and says, "Oh, he knows." I'm not sure if she means Bruce or Dick, but I guess it doesn't matter. "Watch!" She says excitedly as she turns up the audio output of the camera.

I focus on the surrogate brothers. They are standing next to a trapeze rigging that I'm guessing was put up a long time ago when Dick first came to live with Bruce. I listen as Dick argues, "Come on, Tim, I just want to do a few basics. It won't take long."

Tim argues back, "That's not the point, Dick. You know you're not supposed to be doing anything like that yet. I don't want to be responsible if you get hurt again. Not to mention that Bruce would kill me."

Dick's voice almost takes a whining quality as he continues his defense, "I've been doing this stuff before I could walkâ€"the first time I mean. I know how not to get hurt. Come on..just a few minutes."

Tim sighs, and I can see that he's given in. "Ok, but just a few

minutes. And just the basics, ok?"

Dick nods in agreement, and he gives a huge smile. "Thanks, man," he says as he pats Tim on the back. He heads for one side of the rigging and starts to climb enthusiastically. I noticed that even though he doesn't seem to climb as easily as he probably did before the shooting, he doesn't have that hard of a time getting up. After a moment of shaking his head, Tim heads for the other side.

Dick reaches his platform first, and he's out on the swing holding with his hands while Tim prepares. I ask, "Tim knows the trapeze too?" I know of course that Dick came originally from a circus family.

Barbara answers, "Dick's taught us all a little of the trapeze. Even Bruce." I nod as I turn my attention back to the scene before us. What I imagine would have been trivial for Dick before the accident gives him trouble as he has to try a couple times before he's able to get his legs up and locked around the swing. He releases his hands from the swing as Tim times his first swing out. Dick goes back into flying position—hands grasping the bar—as Tim mimics Dick's previous position, which I know from Dick talking about flying as a child, is the catcher's position.

I hear Dick ask Tim if he's ready, and Tim answers, "Yeah." One more swing back, and Dick releases. He tries a lateral half turn and Tim clasps his hands without a problem. I hear Dick signal, and they release, Dick returning to his own swing.

The brothers return to their platforms and Dick grins, "No problem.." He continues, "I want to try a somersault. Ready?"

"You sure?" Tim asks. He looks nervous which I think is extremely understandable. Barbara's so excited to watch her love doing what he loves that I'm trying hard not to comment on how dangerous what Dick is doing really is.

My attention goes back to the monitor as Dick says, "Yeah. I'm used to being able to do four at once. I think I can handle one." His voice is almost sarcastic.

I get the impression Tim caught the sarcasm as he responds, "Yeah, but you're not used to getting shot and not being able to walk for six months. And I'm not used to worrying about if I'm going to lose the most important person in my life."

Dick bows his head at Tim's acknowledgement. "I'm sorry about that, Tim," He says solemnly. "But the sooner I can get going, the sooner we can go out together. You know the doctors don't know how quickly I recover. They're too conservative."

"Yeah, well, sometimes I think you're not conservative enough."

Dick laughs. "Aw, Tim, now you're just bein' a mother hen," he teases. "One somersault, I promise. Then I'll quit."

Tim sighs again, and I get the impression that Dick is constantly talking his 'younger brother' into trouble. "Ok. \*One.\* But that's it, ok?"

Dick laughs again and grins, "Cross my heart." He traces an x on his chest.

Dick jumps off his platform and starts swinging. After rolling his eyes and sighing yet again, Tim follows. They move into position, and after Tim signals, Dick starts his tumble. As I watch, I see that Dick can't seem to get his legs tucked in enough so he can't spin fast enough. I hear Barbara gasp as he misses Tim's catch and falls into the net below. Fortunately he has no problem falling safely and for a moment he lays dejectedly in the net, letting it oscillate him for a few seconds. Finally he moves to the edge of the net and easily flips himself to the ground. Tim follows soon after, releasing in a controlled descent and quickly joins Dick.

Tim takes one look at Dick's disappointed look and says, "Hey, give yourself a break. First try in six months after being in a wheelchair for four of them? I say that's not bad at all."

Dick shrugs and says, "Yeah, I guess. But I should have been able to do that in my sleep."

Tim returns the shrug and says, "Man, don't worry about it. You'll be flying again in no time."

I see Barbara bow her head in disappointment, and I step forward so I can place my hand on Barbara's shoulder. I say quietly, "Tim's right, sweetheart."

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It's cold as I wait for my partner on the rooftop. As I contemplate, I realize that it's the year anniversary of that terrible night. It's probably just as cold as it was a year ago, but somehow it doesn't seem as cold as I consider the year's events. I think we all learned important lessons in this past year, and I'm sure Dick has learned to be much more careful, not that I don't think he was careful before.

"Commissioner." I hear my title, but it's not sudden, and it doesn't surprise me. I am pleasantly surprised as I turn to see Nightwing standing before me wearing a triumphant smile. I return Nightwing's smile, and say, "It's wonderful to see you. Is this your first night?" I'm careful to keep my knowledge of his dual identity unspoken, not because I think anyone's listening, but because if I don't speak it, maybe I can now go back to convincing myself that I don't know it.

Still smiling, Nightwing nods and says, "Yeah, it feels great too. I'll be going back to Blüdhaven soon."

I smile and answer, "Good. You're alone?"

He shakes his head, and says, "No, Batman is waiting. I asked to come to you alone first because I want to thank you for all you've done."

"Oh, it's nothing," I try to brush off his thanks modestly.

"No, it's not," he corrects me. "I'm grateful for what you've done

for me, but I'm more grateful for what you've done for Bruce, Tim, and Barbara. You really helped to keep us thinking straight. I'll always owe you for that." I'm taken by surprise at how easily he refers to his civilian persona.

I pause, looking at the ground, and then I nod, looking up again. I simply say, "You're welcome." I pause again. As I'm absorbing the moment, Batman arrives and nods his head in greeting. I nod silently in return, and start the briefing. They get to business quickly, asking me questions in turn and showing their ability to work as a seamless team.

Finally, we exhaust the information exchange, and Batman moves to the edge of the roof. Nightwing starts to get his jump line ready, but he doesn't move from where he's standing. I look at him questioningly as he looks solemnly at his jump lines as he prepares them without hurry, and with apparent disregard to his partner. Right as I think he is going to move, he looks up at me, and I can see the tell-tale glisten of unshed tears through his mask. He simply says, "Thank you." He joins his partner, and together they swing out of sight.

End  
file.